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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000198

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SUBJECT: PETIT GOAVE POSTCARD: HARBINGER OF POLITICAL
UNREST CALM IN 2008

REF: 07 PORT AU PRINCE 1782

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¶1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified -- please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: The coastal city of Petit Goave (West Department), historically the vanguard of major uprisings in Haiti, is now largely calm - both politically and with respect to crime. Former sworn political enemies now collaborate. Like most of Haiti, Petit Goave suffers from neglect by the central government, and lacks the most basic municipal and state services, such as potable water, health care, sanitation and education. MINUSTAH cites the possibility of drug trafficking, which local authorities deny. Local government officials and police are poorly equipped to address these issues. Local confidence in the Haitian National Police is far stronger than in MINUSTAH. Residents mistrust the mostly Sri Lankan local MINUSTAH detachment due to past sexual misbehavior and suspicion of ongoing criminal activity. USAID implementing partners in Petit Goave -- IOM (International Organization for Migration) and CHF International -- tout progress in environmental protection, provision of potable water, sanitation and road conditions. Like much of Haiti, the current stability in Petit Goave is superficial and precarious. It will be difficult to maintain absent stronger economic growth and job creation, an expanded and better-equipped Haitian National Police presence, and greater financial support from the government in Port-au-Prince. End summary.

The Basics: Population, Economy, Politics

¶3. (U) Poloff on January 9 visited Petit Goave, known as the starting point for past uprisings in Haiti. Petit Goave is about 65 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince with a population of approximately 165,000, according to the 2004 census. Although Petit Goave suffered flooding during Tropical Storm Noel in October 2007, it was not declared an official 'flooded area' by the GoH, and thus received no recovery assistance. The city has nothing by way of industry. Its port is inoperable, though rumors abound that an American

businessman wants to buy it and revitalize the tourist industry. Politically, Petit Goave is traditionally a stronghold of MDN (Mobilization for National Development), a political party composed of many former military members. MDN is now part of the coalition GFCD (Grand Front of the Center Right), a right-wing pro-military alliance formed in 2003 and currently holding no seats in the parliament. The current mayor was elected under the GFCD banner, although the national deputy, Limongy Jean, is a member of Alyans.

MINUSTAH Civil Affairs Assessment

¶4. (SBU) MINUSTAH Civil Affairs representative for Petit Goave, Blandine Umurerwa, cited to Poloff the presence of a multitude of associations, organizations and other civil society groupings in Petit Goave. Local elected officials have expressed a desire to work with MINUSTAH on a concerted development plan. Umurerwa sees 'enormous' potential as a tourist destination, given the area's beautiful, if polluted, beaches. Petit Goave already has a port, which is inoperable at the moment but could act as a boon to tourism. The 'dynamic' populace possesses a certain political pragmatism: the elites and other politically active citizens of the commune have always known how to attract the attention of the national and international communities. The city is very sensitive to, and engaged in, national politics, having actively participated in the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship and in pushing Jean-Bertrand Aristide's 2004 departure. MINUSTAH also cited the possibility of drug trafficking.

USAID Partners on Politics and Development

¶5. (U) Francois Fournier, head of IOM's PREPEP (Program de PORT AU PR 00000198 002.2 OF 003

Revitalization et de Promotion de l'Entente et de la Paix) project in Petit Goave, told Poloff that residents of Petit Goave proudly proclaim themselves 'very political,' which Fournier explained translates as 'very violent.' The ex-FAD'H (Armed Forces of Haiti) was very strong in Petit Goave three years ago when IOM began working in the city. Fournier, a Canadian with eight years of experience in Haiti, including several with MINUSTAH, described Petit Goave as 'almost as violent as Gonaives, with an equally short fuse.' Violent uprisings in recent Haitian history began alternatively in Gonaives (Artibonite Department) or Petit Goave. Today the political situation is calm, with former partisans of the Democratic Convergence working side by side with members of Lavalas. Fournier noted that this cooperation between former political foes would have been impossible just two years ago. (Note: IOM focuses solely on urban areas in Haiti, going into 'hot-spots' before most other NGO's in order to create some stability. IOM has worked in Petit Goave since 2004. End note.)

¶6. (U) Poloff met with Irina Bulfinsky, CHF International project manager for Petit Goave. CHF's job creation program, KATA (Konbit ak Tet Ansamb, literally "Work Crew with Heads Together") began by organizing a KATA Committee consisting of 22 members of the local community, including local elected officials, community leaders, NGOs, and association leaders representing women, youth, people with disabilities, and the private sector to meet every two weeks to prioritize projects of vital interest to the commune. KATA requires that 20 percent of project costs be paid by the community, usually in-kind rather than with money. KATA is also securing funding from some of Haiti's wealthy business leaders, including Gregory Mevs (President, Terminal Varreux) and Jean-Maurice Buteau (President of mango exporter JBM S.A.). The priority projects identified by the communities in collaboration with CHF include reforestation and environmental conservation; drainage canal construction and cleaning; public water fountains dispensing potable water;

paving of major city streets; building a new market; and the paving of a rural road connecting seven communes that has fallen into disrepair.

New Mayors Cite Many Needs

¶17. (U) Poloff met with the three members of the mayoral council: principal mayor Marc Roland Justal and deputy mayors Emmanuela Osselin and Yves Lindor of GFCD (Grand Front of the Center Right). Giving his laundry list of needs, Mayor Justal noted the GoH has neglected schools and health care services. Petit Goave has no jobs, no businesses, and no functioning port. The deputy mayors both thanked IOM for providing electricity and potable water, but complained that the town still faces a severe shortage of the latter. Even so, they explained that rural parts of the commune are much worse off, as they have no HNP or MINUSTAH presence, no roads, schools, security, waer or electricity. Additionally, the agricultural sector is suffering from deforestation and a broen irrigation system, which the mayors noted theMinistry of Agriculture has put in the 2008 budget. The mayors said the central government tries to help Petit Goave but has no funding to do so. The closest GoH offices are situated in Leogane, about 25 miles east. The Ministry of Public Works (TPTC) has some rehabilitation projects for the principal roads.

Police Lack Officers, Equipment

¶18. (SBU) Petit Goave Police Commissar Pierre Nonchamp Beauzile told Poloff that while major crime incidents are rare, the number of police is inadequate to address the commune's security needs. Fifty-five police (one female) are assigned to the commune, divided among three commissariats and 12 sub-commissariats. The police force is short of equipment, including weapons, computers and fingerprinting equipment, which prevents them from looking up criminal records. They have one car for the whole commune, and a

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small number of motorcycles. Limited funds make it difficult for the HNP to investigate cases. For example, when CHF's Bulfinsky questioned Beauzile about their investigation of the August kidnapping of a local engineer who had worked with CHF, he was unable to cite any evidence of follow-up on the investigation.

¶19. (SBU) Beauzile asserted there are no drug traffickers in the commune except those that pass through en route from the southern coast to Port-au-Prince. Major security concerns come from gang members from Port-au-Prince taking refuge in the surrounding hills. There is no prison, and the single cell in the main commissariat often holds 40 to 50 prisoners at once. MINUSTAH provides four UN Police, but they work with the HNP only during daylight hours. The commissar emphasized the community's strong cooperation with the HNP, stating the people have confidence in the police and they have no conflicts. He plans to launch a sensitivity campaign in May, primarily in schools, to further enhance citizens' confidence in the HNP. (Bio Note: Beauzile was a member of the HNP's first graduating class in 1995. He worked nine years for CIMO (riot control) in Port-au-Prince before becoming divisionary inspector in Delmas. He has been Commissar of Petit Goave since May 2007. End bio note.)

UN Police: Improvements and Challenges

¶10. (SBU) UN Police Officer Louis Antoine (Cameroon), who has spent 14 months in Petit Goave, told Poloff that UNPol helps HNP investigate of many cases of assault and rape, most often perpetrated against neighbors and family members. Contradicting Commissar Beauzile's statement, he said it is difficult to collect evidence on crimes as residents are

reticent toward the police and hesitate to report crimes. He explained that part of the problem is fear of reprisal from criminal perpetrators. He noted HNP improvements over the last 14 months, saying the police are more visible and patrol more frequently. (Note: Citizens harbor a strong mistrust of MINUSTAH, according to Bulfinsky. Members of the Sri Lankan Battalion, whose previous rotation was publicly accused of transactional sex and sexual involvement with minors (ref A), are also widely believed to steal residents' chickens and goats. ''They don't spend a dime on the local market on food,'' according to one resident. End note.)

¶11. (SBU) Comment: Petit Goave is no different from other Haitian cities outside the capital in that the security situation - both politically and in terms of crime - is generally calm, but the GoH fails to meet the basic needs of the population. Petit Goave is unique in that it does not have a permanent gang presence as we see in the other hotspots. Rather, it has a politically charged populace braced to fight for the cause of the day. This propensity for sudden uprisings makes the city a bellwether for political unrest and an area to watch carefully. Though their efficacy has yet to be truly tested, successful development programs appear to be easing existing tensions within the populace. Nevertheless, absent real job growth, a larger and more capable Haitian National Police presence, and serious help from the central government, the stability we observed in Petit Goave will remain precarious.
SANDERSON